

Newnham

The challenge has been met



The Oregon athletic department will feel a little less pressure, sports editors across the state will bring the "scoop" back out of mothballs and local readers will realize just how good he was.

Eugene Register-Guard Sports Editor Blaine Newnham, 34, will leave that position March 29 to become city editor of the paper.

"It's a new challenge for me," said Newnham. "I've always been a competitive person. In the Bay Area (Newnham worked for the *Oakland Tribune*) the challenge was just writing good sports stories. When I came here, the challenge was to put out a first-class sports section. I think I've met that challenge and I'm ready for the next step."

While Newnham's move may ultimately make the Register-Guard a better paper, it'll also leave a void on the sports page that he's coordinated for the last four-and-a-half years. His impact in this community since 1971—reflected mainly in the 800 columns he's written—won't be fully realized until his departure.

If you look closely, you can see the impact now. Had Newnham not posed some thought-provoking questions, Oregon might still be searching for an athletic director, Mac Court fans might still be pelting the floor with paper and Oregon might be without the outstanding national-caliber track meets it's enjoyed the last three years.

"I believe it's the sportswriter's role to ask why," said Newnham, "to make people aware of situations which might need changing."

One of the less important but most obvious changes Newnham prompted was the painting of the white markings on the AstroTurf at Autzen Stadium last fall. He asked why on a Friday. The following Saturday, the lines had been painted.

If the athletic department has felt Newnham's presence since '71, so have sports editors across the state. Most have found Newnham to be an honest, hard-working, likeable guy who also happens to get every scoop available.

Since September, the Register-Guard has been first to report Norv Ritsch's resignation, John Caine's appointment, Lonnie Shelton's ineligibility and Oregon's National Invitation Tournament offer.

"Some sportswriters try to be clever and others put words together well," said Newnham. "I try to be on top of everything that's going on."

If you've ever read a Newnham piece, you know he can write. His smooth, colorful writing goes well beyond the scoreboard and the stat sheet.

"Above all, I've tried to be interesting," said Newnham. "I've tried to give the reader something that will make him assume that if he reads the column, it'll be time well spent."

Not everyone has appreciated Newnham's columns. Back in Oakland, George Blanda wasn't overjoyed when Newnham wrote that the aging Blanda couldn't last the season if thrust into the No. 1 quarterback role for the Raiders.

"I'll kick you over the goal post," Blanda politely told Newnham.

"I'll be short and to the right," replied Newnham, never one to lack wit.

Upon migrating to Oregon, Newnham quickly made waves. "I got a reputation for being cocky right off the bat," he said. "But, then, I wanted to be controversial."

"Blaine has a lot of integrity and character," said Alton F. Baker, editor of the Register-Guard. "He says what it is without being in the hip pocket of the participants. And that's an important attribute."

While admitting he's had some "screaming sessions" with Dick Harter, Newnham says the biggest problem he's faced is the opposition to the amount of Oregon State sports the Register-Guard runs.

"We've received a lot of criticism for running so much on the Beavers," said Newnham, himself a Duck with a subtle set of buck teeth. "People around here feel very strongly you're either for them or against them. You're either a Beaver or a Duck."

Newnham prefers to call himself a reporter above anything else. He spends most of his time researching and never spends more than an hour writing his column.

"If I have a quality above anything else, I suppose it would be that I'm sensitive to things," Newnham said. "I try to give the reader what he wants to know. For example, I could go to Saturday's NIT games and report on how good the teams Oregon could be playing are. But I think it'd be better to go with the team and let people know how a guy like Danny Mack will react to the Manhattan."

Newnham reigned at a unique time in Oregon sports. Not surprisingly, he found Oregon basketball and Steve Prefontaine the most intriguing stories.

"I've found the inconsistencies in Oregon basketball the most interesting—how it's hated around the world and how the people here go nuts over it; how Dick Harter requires so much of his players on the court, in school, in citizenship, yet trips a cheerleader..."

"The Pre phenomena has also been interesting. We spent a lot of time fencing together. I was never a big Pre fan—he left me standing a few times—but I admired him because he never backed down to a challenge."

As for Newnham, his challenge has been met. And another awaits.

... You don't mess around with Buck



Photo by John Johns

Davis beat the odds and OSU's Dillenburg to earn berth in NCAA's this weekend.

By GREG STILES
Of the Emerald

The obtrusive jaw and the evil eyes give one little room for imagination. Buck Davis' hulking shoulders and aggressive style on the wrestling mat tell you he's not the type of guy you'd like to meet behind Taylor's.

Davis is the premier 177-pounder in the Pacific-8. With the cards stacked against him he won the Pac-8 championship.

The odds were against him to even wrestle at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis, let alone capture the Pac-8 title. He'd suffered a broken elbow Jan. 10 and hadn't wrestled since.

"It's really quite phenomenal," said head trainer Larry Standifer. "But he's so doggone good and so tough, I can see why he came back."

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In the championship bout with Oregon State's Mike Dillenburg, Davis dominated the final 20 seconds of the match, after an even two-and-a-half rounds, and walked off with a 12-5 triumph.

People have labeled him as stubborn, aggressive, tough and rambunctious. They can support their accusations by pointing out he's a calf-roper in rodeos that take place near his home in Bend during the summer.

Buck, however doesn't think of himself in those terms. "I'm not that aggressive. I just try to get that way for wrestling matches."

"Roping is something I enjoy and can be more relaxed about," he said. "Wrestling requires a completely different state of mind. I'm more intense when I'm wrestling. It's a personal sort of deal."

"Roping isn't the same as wrestling. I shoe horses in the summer, and rodeo just goes along with that."

"They grow 'em tough in Eastern Oregon," said Standifer, "he's an easy going guy, but an intense competitor."

Oregonians from the eastern side of the Cascades are often hit with avalanches of verbal ribbing, and the husky ex-Bend High Lava Bear is no exception.

"I get a lot of flack because people think the Intermountain League is pretty weak," said Davis. "They just don't think there are many good athletes from that league."

Oregon wrestling coach Ron Finley figured Davis would battle back.

"We don't have just average guys," he said. "I think most of the guys on our team would've come back."

"Buck's not the type of person to get down. He's always positive. When Buck gets determined he's going to do something, he does it. He's a little stubborn and in this case it's a good thing."

Davis said he "would've been selling short" if he hadn't attempted to return to the mats. He knew Tim Strobel was doing a very adequate job in his absence.

"Strobel was doing a super job, and maybe could've done what I did in the Pac-8," admitted Davis. Buck defeated Strobel in a wrestle-off for the tourney berth.

"Tim just couldn't keep him down," Finley said later.

When Davis takes to the mats he's all business. "I wrestle aggressively all the time," he said. "I'm not trying to throw the guy off the mat, but trying to intimidate him."

"I don't have a heck of a lot of technique—I've got three or four basic moves—but what I lack in technique I try to make up by being aggressive."

Dillenburg, Davis' victim in the Pac-8 finals said, "He's always been determined. He's just a tough competitor. When you wrestle him you'd better get mentally tough, or he'll beat you mentally and physically."

"I haven't wrestled too many guys that have beaten me," admitted Davis. "The tougher I make it on the guy, the more likely he is to quit."

It's doubtful he'll meet quitters at the NCAA meet come Thursday, but Davis will probably be making it rough for more than a couple of opponents.

Quitting just isn't Buck's thing.